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SUBJECT: JOSEP BORRELL ELECTED EP PRESIDENT

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The European Parliament (EP) on July 20 elected as its new president Spanish Socialist Josep Borrell. Although a former Fulbright scholar and active supporter of the Fulbright program, Borrell has been one of the Spanish Socialist party's most outspoken critics of U.S. policy, particularly on Iraq. End Summary.

JOSEP BORRELL

[1](#)2. (U) On July 20, at the first plenary session after the June European elections, MEPs elected Josep Borrell the new EP President. Borrell, a 57 year-old Spanish Catalan, is a newly elected Socialist MEP with little prior experience in international politics. He won the EP presidency with 388 votes, against 208 votes for Polish liberal Bronislaw Geremek (candidate of the Liberal and Democrats' ALDE group and the Greens) and 51 votes for French communist Francis Wurtz (candidate of the far-left GUE-NGL group.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) Borrell was born in 1947 in the Pyrenees mountains, the son of a baker. He holds a degree in Aeronautic Engineering and a Doctorate in Economic Sciences. According to biographical notes from the U.S. Embassy in Madrid, from 1973 to 1975 he studied at Stanford under a Fulbright grant, obtaining a Master's in Applied Mathematics-Econometrics. He also received a Master's in Energy Economics from the French Petroleum Institute in Paris. At around this time, he also went to Israel, attracted by the "kibbutz" experience; he met his wife, Carolina Mayeur, during his stay. The couple, who separated in the mid-1990s, has two children.

[1](#)4. (U) Borrell began his political career in 1979 when he was elected to Madrid's regional government and given responsibilities in the area of fiscal policy. In 1982, he was elected General Secretary of Budget and Public Spending within Spain's Finance Ministry. Two years later, he was appointed State Secretary of Finances. In 1991, Borrell was

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appointed Minister of Construction, Transport, and Environment, a position he held until 1996. Borrell was tainted late in the game by the scandal that had chased former President and Socialist party leader Felipe Gonzalez from office. Borrell's political skills won over his party's rank and file, however, and he was elected Chairman of the Mixed Commission of Congress-Senate for the EU. He was chosen in 2002 to represent the Spanish Parliament at the Convention that drafted the EU Constitution.

A CONTESTED POLITICAL DEAL

[1](#)6. (U) Borrell's EP Presidency election was secured by a deal between the two largest EP political groups, the Christian Democrats (EPP-ED) and the Socialists (PES). Under their agreement, Borrell should step down halfway through the five-year legislature to make way for an EPP-ED president, expected to be the group leader, Hans-Gert Poettering. This "technical deal" to share the presidency was strongly criticized by the ALDE and Green party but also by the press and even by some Socialist and EPP-ED MEPs who voted for Geremek against their party line. Borrell has been portrayed in the press as a bureaucratic and weak candidate compared to charismatic and highly symbolic Bronislaw Geremek, a former leader of Solidarnosc trade union in Poland and former Polish Foreign Minister. However, such an arrangement to share the presidency is not new: Irish Liberal Pat Cox became president in 2002 thanks to a similar deal between his party and the EPP-ED in 1999.

BORRELL AND THE UNITED STATES

17. (SBU) As the leader of the Spanish socialist delegation in the EP and as a candidate to the EP presidency, Borrell has been extremely critical of U.S. policy in Iraq and was a leading advocate of withdrawing Spanish troops. During a debate with Geremek, he stressed his strong opposition to the war in Iraq as a main argument in his favor and attacked Geremek for having supported U.S. action. In an interview published on July 29 in the Wall Street Journal, Borrell called for Europe to challenge American dominance, stressing that "Europe can not just be an intellectual reserve for the American empire." He also asserted that "we need to find a middle ground between force without law and law without force, and a pre-emptive war like Iraq is force without law." During his inaugural speech, he pointed to the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin as top foreign affairs priorities for the EU but did not mention transatlantic relations.

18. (SBU) However, on a more positive note, Embassy Madrid describes Borrell as a strong supporter of the Fulbright program, maintaining relations with the Fulbright Commission since his scholarship days. In 1994, as Transport and Environment Minister, Borrell helped establish a Fulbright program for Ministry employees. A total of 13 grantees participated in the program from 1995-1997. According to Embassy Madrid, Borrell in 1993 presented the Crown Prince with an honorary award during the Commission's 35th anniversary celebrations. In his remarks, Borrell lauded U.S.-Spanish relations, commented favorably on his experience with American liberty and democracy as a Fulbrighter, and urged both governments to embrace the Fulbright program as a model of academic excellence and cross-cultural understanding.

(DRAFTED:POL:MVANAVERBEKE)

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